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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: DESERTIFICATION A GROWING PROBLEM

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¶1. Summary. At least 40% of the surface area surrounding the Sahara Desert is threatened by desertification, drought and desert encroachment. Nigeria is losing 1,355 square miles (sqm) of range and crop lands each year, and the far northern states of Sokoto, Kebbi and Katsina have had more than 40% of their landmass overtaken by desert. Since 1950 Nigeria's population has quadrupled and livestock increased more than ten times, putting major strains on already existing marginal range and grass lands. To raise awareness of this destruction, Newton Jibunoh, retired Chairman/CEO of Costain (an international engineering and consulting firm) is making his third voyage across the Sahara. End Summary.

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Nigeria's Problems are the Region's Problems

¶2. On November 8, 2007, ESTH Officer and Econ Specialist met with Dr. Newton Jibunoh (retired), the founder of the Fight Against Desert Encroachment (FADE) to discuss desertification. According to Jibunoh, 40% of the surface areas of the countries along the fringes of the Sahara Desert are under threat of desertification, drought, and desert encroachment. During drought they experience substantial food shortages and with each cycle, dry land degradation increases. Lake Chad, which straddles Chad, Nigeria, Cameroon and Niger was once the third largest body of water in Africa. The surface area of Lake Chad has been dramatically reduced from 9,650 sqm in 1963 to 521 sqm in 2007 - a result of reduced rainfall, high demands for water for irrigation, and human consumption. Several other lakes throughout the Sudano-Sahel have fallen to record low levels and the lands have been severely damaged by erosion.

¶3. Scientists estimate that Nigeria is losing 1,355 sqm of rangeland and cropland to desertification yearly. Nigeria has ten states on the fringes of the Sahara occupying 40% of the country's land mass. Three states, Sokoto, Kebbi and Katsina are the most affected with more than 40% of their landmass overtaken by desert. Since 1950 Nigeria's population has quadrupled, from 33 million to over 135 million and livestock has increased more than ten times from 6 million to 66 million. While Nigeria is endowed with large tracts of fertile land, the increasing loss of marginal areas, especially in the North, that were once used for crops and grassland will eventually force a southerly migration of people and livestock.

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Newton Jibunoh's Odyssey

¶4. Jibunoh, at the age of 70, will be making his third trip across the Sahara Desert by road to raise awareness of the effects of desertification, climate change, and environmental degradation in Africa. Jibunoh began his career as an engineer and soil mechanics

specialist eventually joining the Costain Group, an international engineering and construction firm based in the United Kingdom, where he rose to Chairman/CEO of the West African region. His first trip across the Sahara from London to Lagos took place in 1964 at the age of 28. During his time with the Costain Group, he was invited to do a sabbatical at the Ben Gurion University of the Negev in Israel at the renowned Jacob Blaustein Institute of Desert Research. In 2000 he founded FADE, 35 years later and after his second voyage from Lagos to London through the Sahara at the age of 62. This trip received media coverage from some of the major news organizations (CNN, BBC, Reuters etc.).

15. Under his direction, FADE implemented the "Wall of Trees" project in Kano state. The "Wall of Trees" promotes the planting of trees and vegetation to curb desertification and improve the lives of the surrounding community. The "Wall of Trees", was built as a line of defense to establish a shelterbelt through a specialized farming system suitable for the region to encourage resettlement and empowerment for self sustainability. Boreholes were dug for water and generators were supplied for electricity that will eventually be used in cottage industries which will process the fruits and seeds from the project once they begin to harvest. The project received substantial support from the Kano State government and the British High Commission in Nigeria.

16. Jibunoh's third journey across the Sahara is planned to take place in February 2008, and he will document the entire trip. The team will consist of four crew, two vehicles and take approximately two months. In the past, Jibunoh financed the trips from his personal funds, but he is sensitive to Nigeria's image abroad, and instead of asking for donations has been soliciting support-in-kind. Jibunoh will donate two 4X4 vehicles valued at 4 million naira; Exxon/Mobil will provide fuel, lubricants, service and the maintenance of vehicles at a cost of 1.5 million naira; Dunlop Nigeria, will supply tires for both vehicles valued at 400,000 naira; Virgin Nigeria, will fly back the vehicles and crew to Nigeria after the expedition at a cost of 2 million naira; Milkano will pay for the documentaries on desertification, climate change

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and global warming; and the Nigerian Television Authority will provide coverage during the expedition. Jibunoh is still looking for sponsors to assist in setting of a website, and support establishment of a mission control center that will be equipped with IT, satellite and communication tracking devices.

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Comment

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17. Jibunoh is a Nigerian who has made his mark in life. He has received a number of government awards and local cultural titles based on his achievements. He could live a very comfortable life at 70 years young- the rewards of being a Chairman/CEO of a major international engineering and construction organization. He has devoted a lot of his own time and money to bring awareness to desertification and desert encroachment in Nigeria, hopefully with this trip he will keep it alive and raise the commitment to find solutions before it is too late.

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